

Review of Young Historians. -A video series on history for children by Deepa Dhanraj.

How do you teach history to primary school children? What is the experience that children should get in a history class? What is the importance of teaching history to children? What preparation does a history teacher need to do before entering the classroom? What are some elements of a good history class? How can you make history class interesting and meaningful? If history is not dates and fights between Kings, then what is history? These are some of the questions our teachers usually have. There are many attempts by different people to answer these questions. People have responded to these questions through articles, books, lectures, workshops and discussions. Deepa Dhanraj has attempted answering the above questions very meaningfully in the medium that she is good at- video films. She has produced a series of 9 video films-- **Young Historians**. She travels with a group of primary school children capturing the process of their understanding of history in different places with the help of a creative teacher.

Deepa has produced a video series which is very unique. It is a series of 9 films each of half an hour duration. While each one can be viewed independently, it can be viewed as a whole for a better and larger understanding. I have watched these films many times with different audiences, with different purposes. As a film, it educates and entertains any layperson. For the children watching these films it is an exciting experience, teaching them some history in a very enjoyable way taking them virtually to these places of historical importance with lots of fun and challenge. For the teachers and teacher educators it gives both the subject knowledge and pedagogy of teaching history.

The script by Kotaganahalli Ramaih is deceptively simple. A group of 16 children are engaged in studying history through exploration and active engagement with a dynamic and creative teacher; the teacher successfully facilitates the entire process with the help of practitioners, experts, researchers and performers. The choice of the subject, the active participation of the children, the larger than life locations, and different artistic forms used to elicit the needed responses, all these make viewing this series a pleasant and rich experience.

Our Family History

(30:59mts) The series starts with the children finding the history of their own family. In the beginning the children meet the folk historian- Yelavaru, who has created and maintained history of different families. It gives us a glimpse of the process of creating oral history and singing it to the families concerned. The children meet their family members and from them construct their family history. They draw the family tree with the inputs from the elders. The selection of the children belonging to the dalit group makes a very strong statement. The family members recount how in olden days they had to carry in a pot the night soil and the sewage water of the upper caste on their head.



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Our Village History (31:30mts) In this unit the children go to the village to speak to their elders and collect details about some of the important aspects of the village - an upper caste well, a old temple and the granary. The elders share their experience of the great famine and quit India movement of 1942. They also speak of the introduction of the ration after the World War 2. The process of collecting the data from the people and consolidating it in the group later by the children through discussion, arguments, refutation, and verification is very interesting.

Archeology and Sculpture (30:40mts) It starts with the facilitating teacher spreading a few household material in front of the children and asking them to explain the nature of the household, the number of people and their occupation, food habits etc. What follows is a very animated discussion by the children. Through discussion, challenge and guessing they come to some conclusion with the help of the evidences available. Later an expert helps the children understand the life of the people thousands of years back with the help of the stone tools evacuated from the site in N.W Karnataka. In the last part, the children visit Aihole and learn history through the sculptures.

Learning History Through Inscription (29:42mts) The children go to the site of Badami and Pattadakallu and unearth history through the inscriptions found in temples and ruined monuments. An expert explains and demonstrates the process of reading the inscription by copying it on the paper. In the end the teacher explains the multidimensional role of the temples. He explains how these temples were a center for worship, entertainment, trade, business, justice and education.

Sea Routes (29:59mts) In this unit the children go to coastal Karnataka to find out about the sea routes. A local teacher helps them to trace the route the traders would take with the help of a globe and mark it in a map. They travel in a boat and find out from the sailor the process of finding the route in the deep sea. Towards the end they come to a ship building yard and speak to the builder and gather information about the process of building a ship

Trade and History (31:16mts) A local expert in the field helps the children understand about trading that was vibrant in Basrur, an ancient port of India. He helps the children understand the rise and fall of that port due to the various forces- natural and manmade. They visit the local Jain Basadi and through the sculpture try to find out the connections and relationship they might have had with the countries like China, Africa and Middle East. A carving of Chinese Dragon and African Giraffe in a Jain Basadi of Moodabidri is very exciting for the children. A coin collector helps the children construct history through the coins.

Jainism and Gomateshwara (29:00mts) The unit starts with the narration of Bahubali's story by a story teller (Bhavani). The children visit the monolithic stone statue of Bahubali in Srawanabelagola and find out from a sculptor

of Karkala the detail and mechanics of sculpturing statues. They visit the thousand pillars Basadi in Moodabidri and get a glimpse of Jainism through the rendering of Pampa's Adipurana by a Gamaka singer. The discussion on how literature provides us some clues to construct history is very insightful.

Jataka Tales and Buddhism (29:40mts) The unit starts with a life story of Gautama Buddha. Two interesting stories from the Jataka tales (THE SWAN and the GAUTAMA AND DEVADATTA) are narrated to the children with the help of beautiful illustrations. The travelogue of Husen Tsang is used to understand the university that was there at Nalanda. This piece is animated with beautiful illustrations. In the end the children write their travelogue and discuss the use and elements of a good travelogue.

History Vachanas Reveal (27:59mts) In this last unit, the focus is on understanding history from the Vachanas created by the vachanakars of the Bhakti movement of 12th Century. A local team sings selected Vachanas of Basavanna and the children ask questions to understand the background and context of the Vachanas to construct the situation that led ordinary people to plunge in to the movement which fought against all forms of discrimination and worked towards a society which was **just, humane and equitable**.

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The content of the film is very well worked out. The essence of what has to be taught in history class comes across very powerfully. The choice of the topics is made with a lot of care and concern. Visiting the sites and of interacting with the experts and practitioners makes the film rich and rewarding. The team has exploited the medium aptly. The frames, color and the lights all together makes some of the pieces look like a good painting. The places they have chosen to visit are very rich and full of varieties hence viewing the entire series

is not boring and does not tire one.

Deepa has used a variety of forms very effectively. Visiting actual sites, meeting elders and family members, teachers transacting specific topics, discussion with practitioners, inputs by experts and researchers, some of the media she has used creatively to convey the messages are narration, storytelling, folk songs, colorful illustrations, animations, probing questions by children and the teachers which make us pause and think. In the film there are plenty of lighter moments like children watching the monkeys playing. There

are patches of silence here and there, which is refreshing and helps us to think and relook at the issue discussed. The transition from one topic to the other is very smooth and logical.

The film very strongly drives home the point that teaching history need not be miserably boring and confined to remembering the dates the kings fought with each other. Children deserve the best and thank you Deepa for giving them the best.

Produced and Directed by: Deepa Dhanraj

Cinematography: Navaroze Contractor

Script: Kotaganahalli Ramaih

Facilitating teacher: Chegga Reddy

Presented by: EDC and DSERT

Produced in 2005 and presented in 2007

The film is in Kannada with English subtitles

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